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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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UNCLAS NIAMEY 000950

DEPT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL/AE, AND AF/PDPA SANCHEZCROWE
DEPT PLS PASS TO USAID FOR AFR/W
ACCRA ALSO FOR USAID WA
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: Government Warns Independent Media

Ref: a) 08 Niamey 809 b) Niamey 493 c) Niamey 507
d) Niamey 936 e) Niamey 00844

1. (U) Summary: The Government of Niger (GON) admonished three independent media organizations on November 19 for disseminating the statements of former Prime Minister Hama Amadou claiming that President Tandja intended to kill him. In a written warning, the GON's media regulator, the High Council for Communication (CSC), said that publishing the statements was illegal and must stop. This incident, plus extensive coverage given to the November 22 demonstration calling for President Tandja to step down from office and a series of editorials critical of the controversial 6th Republic, has quieted speculation that the GON had compromised the independent media after a press junket to accompany a GON delegation on a swing through West African capitals in late October. End summary.

GON Admonishes Media for Airing Claims of Former PM

2. (U) On November 19, the CSC, the GON media regulatory body, issued a written admonishment against the private media companies Dounia Media Group, Anfani, and L'Actualite for broadcasting the statements of the former Prime Minister of Niger, Hama Amadou, accusing President Tandja of homicide and the intention to kill him. The CSC wrote that the airing of this allegation discredited and defamed the Head of State and was punishable under Articles 21 and 38 of the legal code of March 1993.

CSC Claims Former PM's Statements Unlawful

3. (U) The CSC also claimed that Amadou's statements would likely exacerbate the political climate and undermine the efforts of the ECOWAS mediator. They added that respecting and safeguarding the public order and social harmony is imperative for the media, and warned the media to cease partisan broadcasts inciting hatred and sedition, a contravention of Article 17 of the legal code of July 2006.

Independent Media Air Threats Claimed by Former PM

4. (U) During an interview conducted with private radio and television operator Dounia during the visit of a Nigerien civil society and opposition delegation consultation with ECOWAS in Abuja, Nigeria, Amadou said that he would not return to Niger because President Tandja would kill him, as he has recently done to others. Amadou called on the people of Niger to resist Tandja's dictatorship. The GON has repeatedly warned Dounia and the CSC has suspended it from operation in the past (Refs a, b, and c). Independent station Radio Anfani and the independent weekly newspaper L'Actualite picked up and disseminated this interview.

Unsuccessful GON Attempt to Sway Media?

15. (SBU) During a November PAS-sponsored workshop on the role of journalists in investigating and reporting human rights abuses, several independent journalists suggested that some major private media organizations would be less critical of the government following a press junket in late October, sponsored by the new Prime Minister, Ali Badjo Gamatie (ref E). The GON invited and paid for representatives from private radio, TV, and print media to accompany a nine-member GON delegation on a tour to "explain the political situation of Niger to West African state leaders." Not long after the junket, however, the independent media gave extensive coverage to a November 22 rally of over 3,000 protestors in Niamey organized by the opposition coalition Coordination of Forces for Democracy and the Republic (Ref d), published several editorials critical of the government, and risked censure by airing the interview with Amadou.

ALLEN